Hold Your Whist

‘Sitting on the butter’

Wednesdays’ were closing days. Our shop closed and in fair weather we went off. Usually across the border, a few miles away to Castleblaney. Here we could buy goods cheaper than at home.

My first watch when at twelve years of age, mum decided I needed one. Time keeping was not my forte. It was gold.

Never knowing at that age it wasn’t real.

Keeping it in pristine condition until

leaving home to get married.

Butter, sugar and even tea were other

items bought as they were so much

cheaper. All smuggled across the border in our clapped out ‘Hillman Hunter’ car.

Luckily that day, as I glanced at my new

watch, the car gave no bother. Purring

nicely, we reached our stop just as the

sunlight was fading.

Alice O’Neill , the barber’s wife was with us. She sat in the back beside me. Noreen was in front. Squeezed between mum and dad. The chatter stopped as the custom’s man approached with his torch in hand. Looking very official in his black uniform. A white stiff hat. Finished off with very shiny black shoes.

“Anything to declare”, was his first comment as he shone the light into the back seat. “How are you all doing”, he added. My sister on the front seat spoke up quickly. “Sheila is sitting on the butter”. “Hold your whisht”, mum muttered, clapping her hand over my sister’s mouth. It was too late. She had it said. Not knowing whether the gods were with us

that day, silence descended on the car.

There was no room left under the spare wheel in the boot of the ‘Hunter’. The butter was placed in the back seat and my wide dress was stretched over. With my hands firmly on the hem, It was safely out of sight.

Coughing lightly, to cover his laughter, Pat smiled broadly asking dad about the bike shop. They were on friendly terms as they met so often at the border station.

After a longer chat than usual, we sped off. Dad pulled into a layby out of sight and as my sister and I jumped out, to have a secret pee, we could hear the laughter in

the car. Alice O’Neill’s laugh was loudest as usual.